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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

FROM : AMCONSUL, LAGOS, NIGERIA 157 DESP. NO.

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON. October 8, 1951 DATE

REF :

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SUBJECT: Fortnightly Review - September 23 to October 6, 1951

POLITICAL

Elections

Before the recent elections to the Western House of Assembly, the two principal political parties were asked by the Government to name their candidates. Only the Action Group did so, Azikiwe's NCNC declining. On the basis of the names submitted by the Action Group, and published in the press, the Action Group has won at least a nominal majority of the posts for which elections have thus far been concluded (38 out of 72). Two areas, however, with a total of 8 more seats, have not yet voted (Benin and Lagos). This appears to represent a resounding defeat to Azikiwe and his NCNC, and a spectacular victory for Obafemi AWOLOWO, head of the Action Group. The latter offered a positive program and widely published its views before the elections on important issues of the day.

Now the battle for Lagos is joined and the results will be known after the forthcoming elections.

Each of the 2 principal political parties has stated that the other is trying to get independently elected victors to declare their allegiance to it, and if many do this, such action could have a telling effect on the final party alignment in the Western House, and determine which party has, in fact, a clear majority.

The Consulate General understands that various of the victorious candidates to the Western House (both parties) are illiterate.

Attempt to Disqualify Dr. Azikiwe

The opposition sought in the courts to disqualify Zik from entering his name on the Lagos voters' list for the elections on the basis that Zik was absent from Lagos between May and July, and at other dates, and therefore forfeited his right under the Electoral Regulation. However, the case was decided in Zik's favor.

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Political Manoeuvers

In its determination to capture control of the Western House of Assembly, as revenge against Zik, the Action Group is reported to be doing everything in its power to thwart Zik's political ambitions. The first step in that direction (according to the NCNC), looking toward putting Zik out politically, was to try to have him disqualified on the basis of the "continuous residence clause", referred to above. That manoeuver, however, failed, as already mentioned. Now, says NCNC, the plan is to try to tie Zik down only to the Western House of Assembly, to which he aspires to be elected. If so, it would be possible for him to be selected by the latter to be sent later to the central legislature (House of Representatives). Since no Action Grouper, after election to the Western House of Assembly, would vote to send Zik to the central legislature, the Action Group could prevent any possibility of the latter if they finally have an actual majority in the Western House. In that case, Zik in that body would be much smaller fry than Zik in the central legislature.

Anti-American Articles

Of late a number of anti-American articles, given prominent first page space, have appeared in the newspaper "The West African Pilot", owned by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, prominent political leader and head of the NCNC. Dr. Azikiwe received his education in the United States.

Mayor of Lagos Given Great Reception

Dr. the Honorable A. B. I. OLORUN-NIMBE, Mayor of Lagos, who has been studying municipal government in Great Britain, returned to Africa on September 23, 1951, and was given an official welcome in Freetown, Sierra Leone, enroute to Lagos. In the latter, on September 26, 1951, he was tendered a huge welcome when many noted personalities, including Azikiwe, met him at the wharf.

ECONOMIC

Crops and Weather

There was exceptionally heavy rainfall in September in the provinces along the Northern borders of Nigeria. As a consequence the prospects for groundnuts and guinea corn in those areas are excellent. Millet yields have been very good. In the cotton belt the rains were somewhat excessive, but the amount of waterlogging caused is not thought to have been sufficient to spoil the prospects of a record crop. Further south the general rain distribution was satisfactory and crop prospects are better than usual.

There seems to be little doubt that crop prospects, particularly in the most northerly provinces, are the best for many years.

Petroleum Search

The Shell d'Arcy Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria, Ltd., has installed the rig for the first oil well, at a cost of about £1½ million, in Owerri Province, Eastern Nigeria, and commenced drilling operations. Chances of success are unpredictable, but the location, about nine miles from the Shell base camp, is geologically promising. The bore-hole is now about twenty feet deep but officials say they are prepared to go to 12,000 feet in the next nine to twelve months.

Marketing Board Records Improvement in Quality of Palm Oil

The Nigeria Oil Palm Produce Marketing Board has reported that the quality of palm oil marketed during the first 6 months of this year showed a gratifying improvement because of the Board's policy which places a premium on top grades. However, the Board recognizes the need for further improvement if Nigerian palm oil is to compete successfully in world markets when the world demand declines and the trade assumes a more normal pattern.

Profit Urge - Price Controls

Petty traders in Lagos are taking advantage of the Government's reluctance to institute price control measures to fight the rising cost of living. Old established firms have on occasion had to increase prices moderately for one reason or another (such as on cigarettes because of increase in duty) but petty traders have boosted prices by 50% in some cases, notably on tobacco products manufactured locally. The same is true of sugar, although the shop price was not increased, the reason being a shortage of sugar.

LABOR

Labor Movement Languishes

There is almost a dead calm over the labor movement generally, there being little or no activity in that field. Some groups, such as the Nigerian Labor Congress, appear to be doing some reorganizing, but, in general the masses of workers have little or no labor leader guidance. Labor has suffered at the hands of dishonest leadership, and labor's purse is reported to be empty. Some feel that the Government is encouraging the formation of

mushroom trade unions by registering new unions with little or no investigation into them.

The once virile union, Amalgamated Union of UAC African Workers, is reported to be practically dead, because of incompetent leadership. Trade unionism is comparatively new in Nigeria, and many feel that the Government should give greater support in building up a healthy trade union movement. The main problem is to find efficient and honest union leadership.

OTHER

Stolen and Forged Passports

Some months ago it developed that a number of blank British passports were stolen from the local passport office, and forged. Apparently a police officer, who held an important desk in the immigration office, did the job and left the country soon after the racket in faked passports was revealed. A manhunt was instituted and many other investigations were made. Apparently some individuals were getting their passports through irregular channels, including students headed for Eastern Germany, who normally could not obtain passports.

The police officer believed to be at the head of the racket was recently located and arrested in London. He will be brought to Lagos to stand trial.

Shortage of Professional and Technical Staffs

There is a marked staff shortage in the medical, veterinary and other departments in Nigeria. This, apparently, is because of a growing number of officers retiring after only brief service periods, together with the fact that the Government finds it difficult to secure the services of qualified personnel from other countries. There is also a marked shortage in technical and mechanical staffs throughout the country.

Educational Exchange Grants

Announcement of American Educational Exchange grants for the year 1952 evoked some grateful commentary in and around Lagos, and recalled the U.S. Government assistance rendered Nigerian students in American schools when devaluation threatened to compel their return home.

The beneficial effect of these grants is probably lessened by the financial assistance, in the form of scholarships, travel

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grants, etc., rendered on a generous scale during the past two or three years by the American Government, private and state colleges and universities, and individuals.

A. W. Childs
American Consul General

Copy to American Embassy, London.

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